

'Whiz Kids' Are Mellowing

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What ever happened to the Pentagon's "Whiz Kids?"

The man who should know reports they're whizzing less now but everybody's enjoying it more.

The influence of the controversial group of bright young civilians is declining, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the services are coming back into their own, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric said today.

The Defense Department, he says, is running more smoothly now that both the officers and the young civilians officials have adapted to each other.

During Defense Secretary McNamara's first year the Whiz Kids angered many top officers who accused them of moving into the military decision-making business.

They Upset the System

The civilians were supposed to be advisers, but in fact, their critics charged, they would raise some question about military policy, study it, work out a proposed solution, sell it to Mr. Gilpatric and Mr. McNamara and then have the services ordered to get cracking in some new direction.

They not only outraged the officers' sense of how military decisions should be made, but they personally irritated generals and admirals by telling them bluntly their judgments were ill-founded and no doubt wrong.

At one time in early 1961 some of the Chiefs of Staff seriously considered a formal protest to the President.

Even during the peak of their influence, both the Whiz Kids and their bosses said privately that this was the wrong way to run a Pentagon. They insisted, however, that there was no better way to make a number of essential policy changes in a hurry.

New "System" Achieved

"Today," Mr. Gilpatric said in an interview, "the Whiz Kids are doing only what we meant for them to do in the first place. They are helping Mr. McNamara analyze programs."

The original "mususe" of the young civilians was necessary, Mr. Gilpatric said. "The services and the staff of the Joint Chiefs too often did not give us information and recommendations in the form we needed. They just weren't organized for it."

But now, Mr. Gilpatric said, the services bring in their positions quickly and "in a comprehensible form," so the Whiz Kids are not needed in the old function.

In the days before Mr. McNamara, the Defense Secretary and his vast office acted essentially as a judge of disputes brought up by the services and as a brake on spending. Under Mr. McNamara civilian leadership is more active, and control is closer.

This is Mr. McNamara's natural way of operating, but it also is made necessary, he believes, by the dangerous and expensive defense we have. Since a miscalculation can be so costly in the nuclear age, civilians will always insist on retaining close personal control over weapons. And since the military budget is at \$50 billion and tending to climb, any Secretary and his staff will have to demand better and better justifications for every expenditure.

Whiz Kids' Project

Last year the Whiz Kids — a handful of civilians who are deputies or top advisers to Mr. McNamara's assistant secretaries — were called on for the basic justifications of weapons and strategy changes.

Mr. McNamara wanted to tighten control over nuclear weapons, build up limited war forces, put more flexibility into strategy and spend less on non-combat functions. He wanted to make the changes fast.

His first move was to appoint civilian-led committees to define the problems. The actual work was done by Whiz Kids who had backgrounds as military analysts for civilian research organizations. Military men answered brush questions and ran errands.

Today, Mr. Gilpatric said, the same studies would be done by the Chiefs and their staffs, and the civilian officials would supply comment.

"The Joint Staff does a first rate job," Mr. Gilpatric said. He picked up a study on nuclear forces and said: "This was done by eight service people on the Joint Staff under Maj. Gen. P. S. Emerick. It is short and specific. It is just what we need to make decisions."

"A year ago," he added, "we couldn't have gotten this out of the Joint Staff. They weren't organized for it."

"The services and Joint Staff would send us a cumbersome report full of narrative, argument and philosophy and accompanied by stacks of data. In one case we had to tell them to summarize the summary they sent."

The civilian bosses just did not have time to plow through the reports. They could either stop trying to be leaders or get quicker, shorter, more pertinent reports.

They chose short reports—first from the Whiz Kids and now from the services.

The 'Kids' Are Mellowing

While the services were adapting to the civilians, the Whiz Kids were mellowing. "We're going soft," one of them said recently with a grin. "We are less arbitrary, less inclined to recommend against a service position when the evidence is not clear-cut."

The Whiz Kids are still powerful men in the Pentagon. Their analyses of military requests carry great weight with the topmost civilians. But they no longer are wagging the dog.